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ABSTRACT

This document, from the lesson plan series, "Teaching with Historic Places," examines the Native Americans who lived on the plains along the Knife River in what is now North Dakota. Following an introductory section, the document sets out student objectives, teaching activities, readings, and illustrations. The teaching activity suggestions include details on "Setting the Stage"; "Locating the Site"; "Determining the Facts"; and "Putting It All Together." The document also includes two map exhibits, notes to the maps, reading handouts, details on visiting the site, suggestions for further reading, and a series of photographs and illustrations. (SG)

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Knife River:

Early village Life on the Plains

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Teaching with Historic Places

A program of the National Park Service's National Register of Historic Places and the National Trust for Historic Preservation

Knife River: Early Village Life on the Plains

BY FAY METCALF

High on a bluff overlooking the Knife River in the Upper Missouri River Valley, soft winds ruffle the lush grasses that cover, but do not obscure, circle upon circle of raised earth with central depressions that mark all that remains of a once lively, noisy village. In the late 18th century, while European colonists were fighting a revolution with England in the eastern part of the continent, these villagers were conducting their centuries-old trade with remote tribal groups; fashioning weapons needed to hunt the big game that shared the rolling hills; tending their gardens of squash, pumpkin, beans, sunflowers, corn, and tobacco; and carrying on all the other occupations of daily life. From the ceremonial plaza—a spot of land that was once the center of village activities—one can look to the northward hills and see trails left from the travois used by hunters and traders.

Looking downward toward the slow-moving river, partly obscured by the cottonwood and willow trees that line the river banks, one can easily imagine groups felling trees to be hauled up the hill and prepared as support beams for new or reconstructed earthlodges. One can almost hear children splashing in the river's cool waters, swimming and playing about in the round bull boats that were used to cross the river.

It is possible to imagine such scenes, because we know what to look for. The writings and illustrations of European American visitors to the villages during the late 18th and early 19th centuries provide a historical record of Plains Indians that is unparalleled in its abundance of information, detail, and diversity of sources. Recent archeological studies have added rich information about the site that goes back at least 3,500 years.

This lesson about Plains Indian life is based on National Register of Historic Places nomination files and other source materials about the Knife River Indian villages. Materials for students include (1) student handouts compiled from contemporary writings by Euro-Americans about the villages, (2) maps of the region with notes, and (3) early American paintings of the villages and the people living there. The lesson

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could be used in teaching units on pre-Columbian North America or the westward movement in 18th- and 19th-century American history. Students will learn to distinguish between primary and secondary sources of information and will strengthen their skills of observation, analysis, and interpretation related to history, geography, the social sciences, and the arts.

Objectives for the Students

To describe the village life of the Hidatsa and Mandan groups during the peak of their culture in the early 19th century and to explain how the villagers both shaped their environment and adapted to it.

- To compare information about these seasonally nomadic Plains villagers with the more popularized film and textbook history of nomadic horse-culture Indians such as the Lakota and Cheyenne.
- To use archeological and historical data to understand the daily life of the villagers during particular time periods.
- To examine various sources of information relating to a particular historic site.
- To discover which American Indian groups once lived in the students' own region and to explore how these local groups were both alike and different from the Hidatsa and Mandan peoples.

Teaching Activities

Setting the Stage

The approximately 1,700-acre Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site is the only unit of the National Park Service that was created primarily to commemorate the history and prehistory of the Plains Indians. The site is not so grand at first encounter as the Mesa Verde, Colorado, cliff dwellings or the "serpent" mounds of the Hopewell culture near what is now Cincinnati. But because it explains so much about early life on the Plains, the Knife River villages complex is of keen interest. The Indians to be studied in this lesson—the Hidatsa, Mandan, and Arikara—may have lived in the region from about 1300 to 1845.

From 1976 to 1983, archeologist Stanley Ahler of the University of North Dakota directed excavations at Knife River sites. By piecing together the story from the remains of earthlodges, 150,000 pottery shards, and 8,400 stone tools from some 50 sites, Ahler constructed what he believes to be an unbroken record of 500 years of human habitation. Even this period represents but a fraction of the time people have lived in the region. The site preserves the record of at least 3,500 years, representing a transition from the villagers' reliance on seasonal hunting and gathering of wild vegetable foods to their reliance on hunting supplemented by gardening. Both early and later peoples were traders—brokers in a widespread exchange of goods.

Historians are equally interested in this site. Detailed written sources and hundreds of paintings and sketches made by European American visitors describe the villages from 1738 through the mid-1840s when the Indian groups, decimated by small pox and other European American diseases, abandoned the site.

Locating the Site

Provide the students with copies of the attached maps to complete the following exercises:

a. Using Map Exhibit 1, locate the Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site in North Dakota, and then examine the detail map showing the villages. Note that the Knife River is a tributary of the Missouri River, a water route early Euro-Americans hoped could lead them to the Pacific Ocean. The Missouri also provided a transportation system for both Indian and Euro-American trappers and traders. Use the map scale to compute the distance from each village to the others.

b. Examine the plan of Big Hidatsa Village. What might this suggest about the relationship between and within the groups?

c. Examine Map Exhibit 2, which shows trading relationships in both prehistoric and historic times. Note the prominent place the Knife River region held in both time periods. List the trade items, noting their potential uses. (Discuss the students' lists.)

d. Read Notes to the Maps. (The notes will provide additional information and answer some of the students' questions.)

e. Determine the trading partners of the Hidatsa and Mandan during historic times. Place a check mark beside the names of Indian nations you know. Check the index of an American history textbook to see how many of these groups are mentioned.

f. On the map showing the trading relationships of the Mandan and Hidatsa Indians, dotted lines mark the boundaries of what would later be known as the Prairie and Great Plains states. Label these states.

Determining the Facts

Village Life on the Knife River

Reading 1 provides a short but comprehensive overview of the way the villagers lived from about 1740 to 1845, when fur traders, the Lewis and Clark expedition, and other European Americans visited the site. Have

the students read the handout and answer the following questions:

a. What natural conditions of the Upper Missouri River Valley did the village Indians use to their advantage?

b. These villagers had a governmental structure quite different from those we know today. What elements of their political system fostered a well-ordered society?

c. The handout states that gender roles were clearly defined. What evidence is presented?

d. The villagers were a preliterate society, meaning they did not have a written language. Since the villagers did not teach their children from textbooks, how did they educate them?

e. How did the villagers make their living?

f. The battle and the hunt are both described in one paragraph. Were these really so similar that, according to the rules of good writing, the two topics can be combined in this way? Explain.

g. How did the spirits guide the villagers? How does the religion of the Knife River villagers compare with other religions you have studied?

Western Contact

Have the students read Reading 2 and answer the following questions:

a. Why would being a center of trade lead to a high degree of "cultural sophistication and affluence"? If you do not know the meaning of these words in this context, try to puzzle them out by looking up each word in a dictionary. If the terms are still unclear, reread Reading 1 and consider the villagers' complex way of life.

b. Why did the Hidatsa and Mandan receive many European American visitors? How did the villagers treat their guests?

c. List the visitors mentioned in the handout. What were their motives for traveling to the Knife River area?

d. How did these visitors change the Hidatsa and Mandan way of life? What happened in later years to the tribes and their allies, the Arikara?

Visual Evidence

With the students, examine the photograph showing the aerial view of Big Hidatsa Village, explaining that what appear to be circular depressions represent the location of earthlodges. Have the students note the location of the Knife River and modern fields and farm buildings. Then ask them the following questions:

a. Is there evidence that the circular depressions were once more extensive than what can be seen in this photograph?

b. Why did American Indians of many centuries ago and European American settlers of the late 19th century consider this a good site for farming? (In spite of the harsh climate, there is alluvial soil, available water from the river, and reasonably flat land for planting.)

c. Can you imagine earthlodges resting on the rims of what are now depressions?

Now show the students the reproductions of the George Catlin paintings, *Hidatsa Village*, *Earth Covered Lodges, on the Knife River*, and *Bird's-Eye View of the Mandan Village*. Both provide a sense of the density of the people and lodges and show some everyday activities.

Earthlodges, which were 30 to 60 feet in diameter and 10 to 15 feet high, each housed an extended family of up to 20 people along with the family's most valuable horses. The size of an earthlodge is not too different from that of the average classroom. By using a middle figure—45 feet in diameter—the students can calculate the square footage contained in an average earthlodge. Have them measure the square footage of their classroom and compare this with the area of the earthlodge. Ask the students to list those items necessary to daily life that would need to fit into the earthlodge, and have them place the items inside. Then give the students copies of the diagram of an earthlodge interior, showing a typical arrangement. Students may be surprised by the space allotted to horses: the best hunting and war horses were stabled indoors for protection from the weather and theft.

Explain to the students that while the villagers spent a good deal of time outdoors in mild weather, the climate was harsh, with recorded winter temperatures often as low as 45° below zero. In winter the people often moved to temporary lodges built among the trees beside the Knife River, where they were protected from the winter winds and had easy access to firewood and water. Show the students the reproduction of the Karl Bodmer painting *Winter Village of the Minatarres* [Hidatsa], and have them compare it with the two Catlin paintings.

Putting It All Together

Three of the most striking cultural aspects of the Hidatsa and Mandan tribes were (1) their practice of living in large villages with houses set close together, (2) their

skill as architects and builders, and (3) the richness of their culture, due in part to their role as brokers in a widespread trading network and their control of an important product—Knife River flint—which was valued for the quality of tools and weapons it produced. Have the students draw generalizations about how the villagers lived in the 1830s when Catlin and Bodmer painted these scenes.

Creating a Matrix

Ask the students to reexamine the reproductions of the Catlin and Bodmer paintings. This time they should look closely, reading the paintings as they would a book, from left to right and from top to bottom. Instruct the students to go over the paintings several times, each time attempting to pick up new details. They should break the paintings into smaller components, by grids, or by looking at the background first, then the foreground, next, groups of objects or people, individual items, portions of the human body, and so on. The students then work in pairs to complete the following exercises:

a. Make lists of items such as the number of earthlodges, the number of people performing certain activities, the types of actions depicted, and the types of clothing, weapons, tools, and sports equipment shown. Classify the data in a matrix using as many categories as needed. The following sample is a useful guide for getting started:

	no. of earthlodges	no. of people	clothing	weapons	tools	sports equipment
Hidatsa						
Mandan						
Winter homes						

b. After comparing matrices with classmates, the students should make additional generalizations about the paintings. One might observe, for example, that the villagers seem to enjoy and excel at sports based on the number of swimmers shown and their apparent enjoyment and by the depiction of villagers playing a game (a hoop-and-spear game known as tchung-kee). Summarize the evidence in the paintings, and discuss the image of the Hidatsa and Mandan Indians as portrayed by Catlin and Bodmer.

c. Draw further conclusions about how the villagers lived by going beyond the evidence of the paintings and including information from the handouts and Notes to the Maps. Write a brief paper on the life of the Knife River villagers during the 18th and 19th centuries, using all available information. This exercise will show the students how written information (history) and evidence from the site itself (archeology) both contribute to an understanding of a people and their environment.

Researching Local Indians

Have the students compare what they have learned in this lesson with materials in an American history textbook that use sites such as prehistoric cliff dwellings or mound cultures to illustrate early life in the Americas. Ask them to outline differences and similarities. Next, instruct the students to research the Indians who lived in their region. Were they more like cliff dwellers than Hidatsa villagers? Were they engaged in early trade? How do their houses, clothing, and other items compare with those of the Knife River villagers? If possible, take the students to visit a local museum that displays prehistoric artifacts from their region. If this can be arranged, have the students construct a matrix of cultural items as they did for the Knife River Indians. Back in class, have the students compare the matrices and then draw conclusions about why the cultures might differ (the environment, available resources, proximity to oceans, and proximity to other tribes, for example).

Making Comparisons

Ask the students to examine an American history textbook account of the Plains Indians, noting similarities and differences between the Knife River villagers and tribes such as the Sioux and the Cheyenne (all these groups are considered Plains Indians). The Hidatsa, Mandan, and Arikara obtained horses along with the other Plains groups in the mid-1700s. Why didn't the villagers adopt the typical American Indian horse culture? Most of the other groups had also been farmers at one time, but they gave up their farms to lead a more nomadic existence. What characteristics of the Knife River villagers might account for their continued occupation of the village sites? Divide the students into two groups, with one group representing the migratory Plains Indians and the other representing the villagers. Have each group list why theirs is the best way of life, and then ask a representative from each to present these arguments. Ask the class to vote on which group's presentation was the most effective in content and reasoning.

Vocabulary

EARTHLODGE

A circular earth-covered wooden house or public building, which usually has its entire interior area dug out to one foot below the ground surface. The outside edge of the excavated area has a ring of poles set into it, forming a wall. Four central roof support posts with rafters across them form a square. Poles are leaned against the rafter

square from the top of the pole wall and across the rafter square, leaving only a central smoke hole. Brush is placed over the wooden frame on all sides, and the entire structure is covered with earth. The lodge is entered by a ladder through the central smoke hole or through a tunnel-like wooden entry passage built into the wall.

PALISADE
A fence of upright logs or poles set on end into the ground for enclosure or defense.

TRAVOIS
A sled-like carrier made of two poles that are dragged on either side of a horse, dog, or person, with a hide or wooden platform between the poles on which a hide tent, household goods, food, or other things are carried.

Further Reading

Students might wish to do further reading about the archeological evidence from the villages and then make reports to the class. A particularly useful work is Stanley A. Ahler, et al., *People of the Willows* (Grand Forks: University of North Dakota Press, 1991). Some interesting topics for other reports include construction of earthlodges in *The Earthlodge*, a short and inexpensive pamphlet published by the Theodore Roosevelt Nature and History Association and available from the Superintendent, Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site, RR #1, Box 168, Stanton, N.D. 58571. George Catlin's *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Conditions of North American Indians*, vol. 1 (New York: Dover Publications, 1973), describes the Okipa, a four-day ceremony reenacting the Mandan creation story and at the same time a coming of age experience. Useful sources for other topics include Thomas and Karen Ronnenfeldt, eds., *People of the First Man: Life Among the Plains Indians in Their Final Days of Glory* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1976); *The Way to Independence, Memories of a Hidatsa Indian Family, 1840–1920* (Minnesota Historical Society), which brings the story of these people closer to the present; and Gilbert L. Wilson, *Waheenee: An Indian Girl's Story Told By Herself to Gilbert L. Wilson* (Bismarck, N.D.: State Historical Society, 1981).

Visiting the Site

The Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site is administered by the National Park Service. The area is located 60 miles north of Bismarck, North Dakota, and can be reached via U.S. Highway 200A. For more information, contact the Superintendent, Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site, P.O. Box 9, Stanton, N.D. 58571.

Notes

Elements of this lesson are drawn from Robert U. Akeret, *Photoanalysis* (New York: Peter H. Wyden, 1973) and Martin Sandler, *Teachers' Guide: In Search of America* (Lexington, Mass.: Ginn and Co., 1975).

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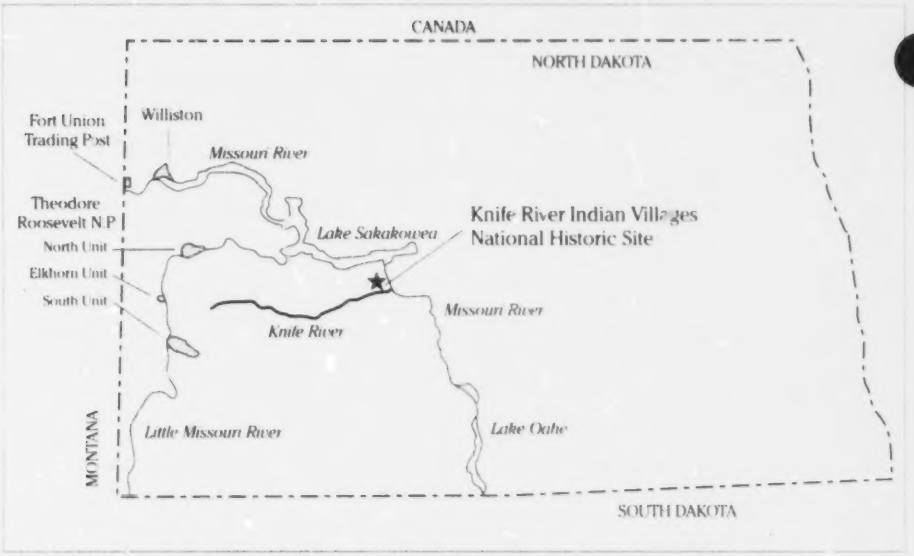
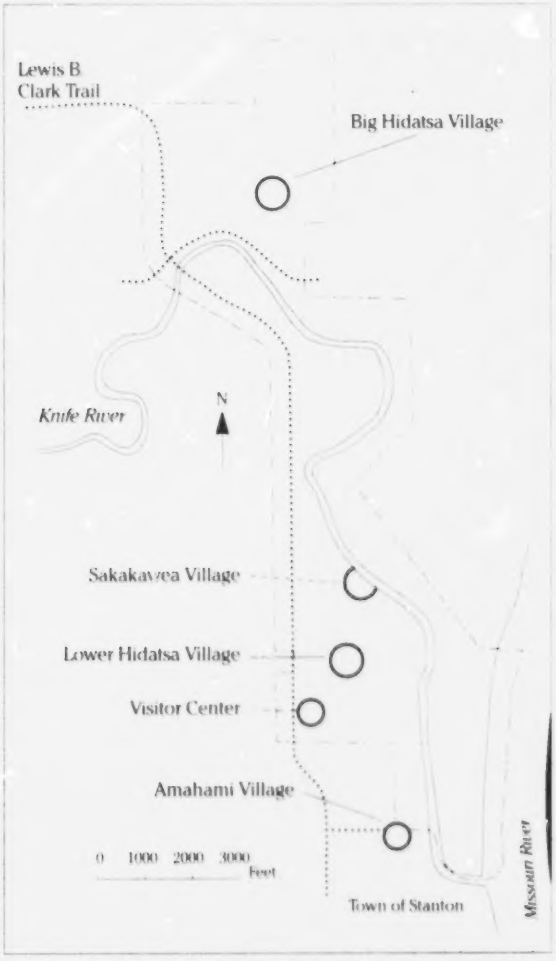
Map Exhibit 1

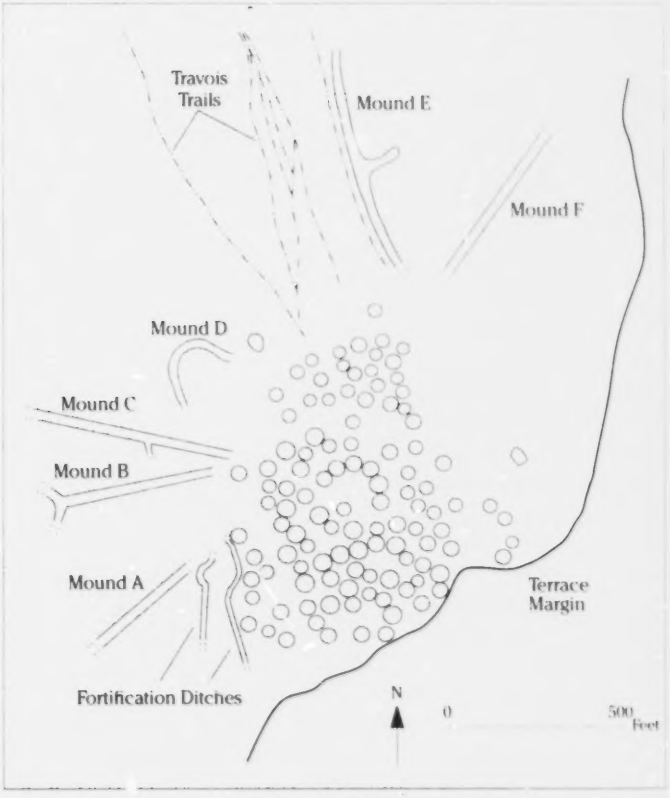
All maps were adapted from Stanley A. Ahler, Thomas D. Thiessen, and Michael K. Trimble, *People of the Willows: The Prehistory and Early History of the Hidatsa Indians* (Grand Forks: University of North Dakota Press, 1991).



State map showing the Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site

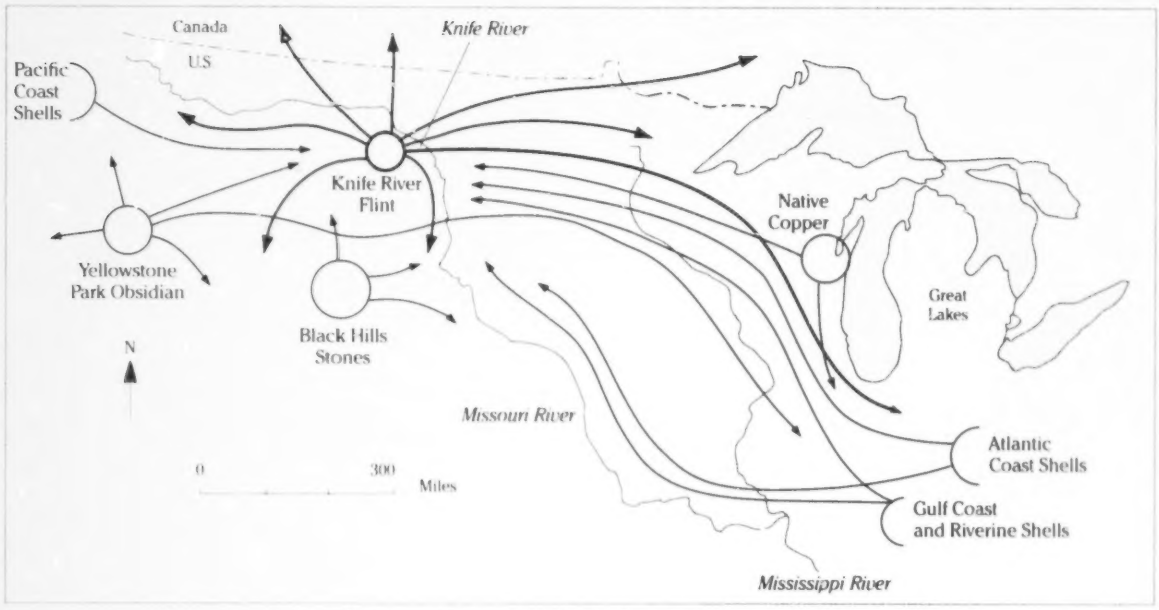


Detail of the Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site

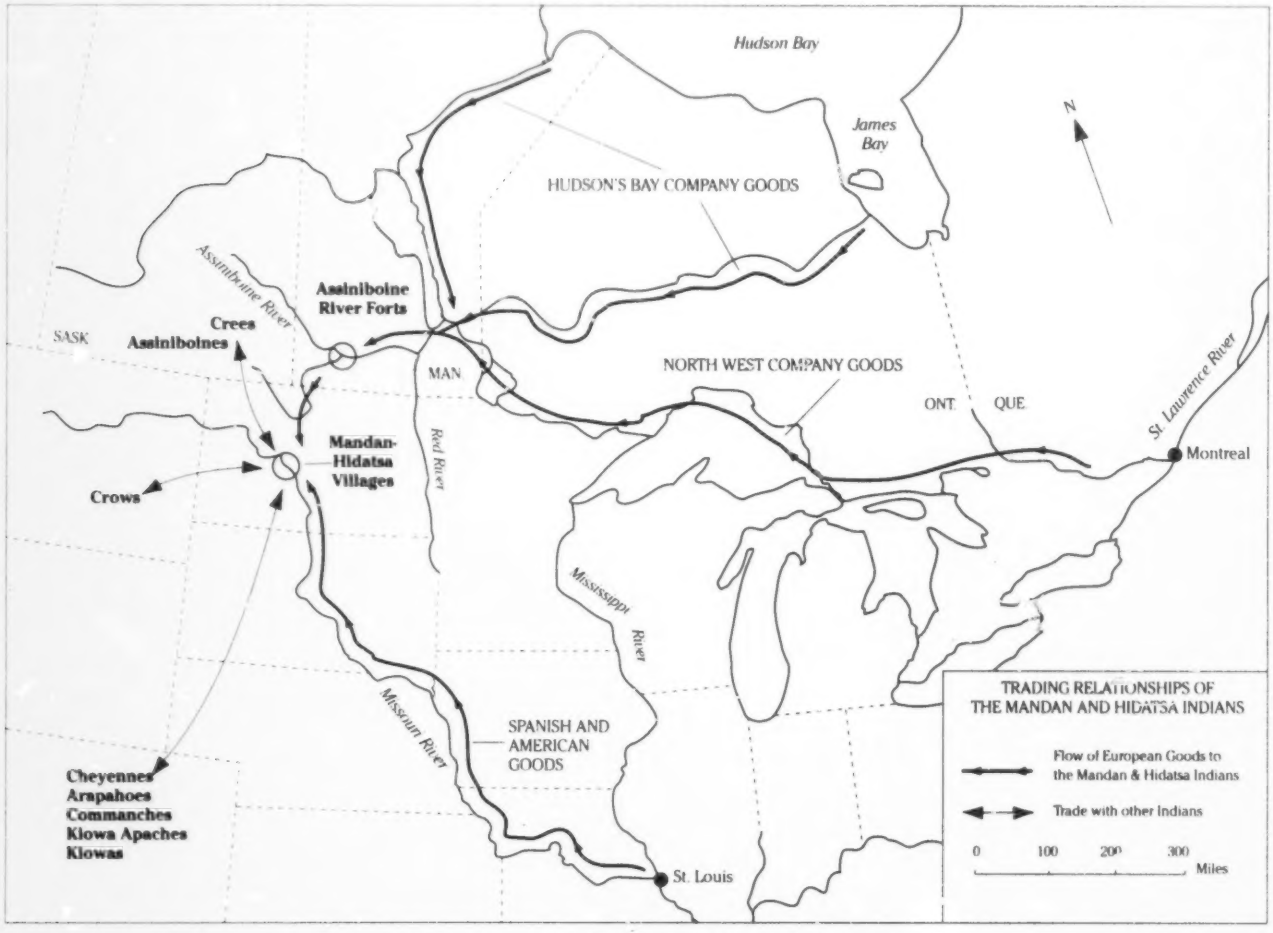


Big Hidatsa Village.

Map Exhibit 2



Movement of durable materials within the Northern Plains prehistoric trading system.



Trading relationships of the Mandan and Hidatsa Indians, c. 1800.

Notes to the Maps

Knife River Settlements

In the 18th and early 19th centuries, what is now the Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site Archeological District was a relatively urban settlement with three large villages: the smallest included 6 acres with 47 houses, the largest 16 acres with 113 houses, each house being from 45 to 50 feet in diameter. Well-traveled horse trails traversed the villages, which had cache pits for storage, and were fortified against enemy attacks with stockades of upright logs. Cemeteries were situated on higher elevations away from active village life and farmland.

Trade at Knife River

The commodities traded in prehistoric times between Indian groups were mostly garden produce, hides, meat, and other perishable items of the hunt. While little evidence of these goods has survived, certain nonperishable artifacts traded into the villages from distant places provide a few clues.

Some of the best evidence for prehistoric trade is found in the stone used to make everyday tools and implements. Knife River flint, which the villagers traded widely, is one such stone of particular importance: it is a dark brown, glassy material which was in great demand for producing durable, sharp-edged implements. Exotic materials, including shells and copper, moved through trade routes to Knife River villages in small quantities, usually in the form of pendants and beads used for personal adornment.

The earliest European visitors observed the villagers to be shrewd traders, exchanging corn, beans, squash, and other horticultural products with their nomadic neighbors for the dressed hides, feathers, lodge covers, and clothing articles of widely dispersed peoples such as the Assiniboine, Plains Cree, Crow, Cheyenne, Arapaho, Kiowa, Kiowa-Apache, and Comanche. Their experience within this trading network prepared the Hidatsa and Mandan to be discerning traders with the Europeans.

The earliest contacts were not with Europeans themselves, but with European products. These were obtained through a network of other Indians who were trading furs directly with the French and other Europeans at forts and contact points along the eastern border of the continent. Glass beads and iron fragments dating from 1600–50, found at the Big Hidatsa and Lower Hidatsa villages, are evidence of this early trade at Knife River.

Direct contact with Europeans began in 1738 when Assiniboine "middlemen" led Frenchmen from Canada to the region. Soon British and Canadian traders began to filter into the region for the prized beaver pelts and for the skins of wolf, fox, and otter. The Knife River villages also became known as a trading post for high quality horses that would be exchanged for guns and ammunition. In this manner, the Hidatsa and Mandan obtained considerable affluence and power among the Northern Plains tribes.

These notes were compiled from Stanley A. Ahler, Thomas D. Thiessen, and Michael K. Trimble, *People of the Willows: The Prehistory and Early History of the Hidatsa Indians* (Grand Forks: University of North Dakota Press, 1991) and from an interagency memorandum sent by Ruthann Knudson, archeologist, Archeological Assistance Division, National Park Service, to Marilyn Harper, historian, National Register Branch, Interagency Resources Division, September 19, 1991.

Handout 1: Village Life in the Upper Missouri River Valley (c. 1740–1845)

A Way Of Life

The Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara tribes shared a culture superbly adapted to the conditions of the Upper Missouri River Valley. Their summer villages, located on natural terraces above the river, were ordered communities with as many as 120 earthlodges, each sheltering an extended family of 10 to 30 people from the region's extreme temperatures. These summer villages were strategically located for defense, often on a narrow bluff with water on two sides and a palisade on the third. In winter the inhabitants moved into smaller lodges along the bottomlands, where trees provided firewood and protection from the cold wind.

In this village society, men lived in the household of their wives, bringing only their clothes, horses, and weapons. Women built, owned, and maintained the lodges and owned the gardens, gardening tools, food, dogs, and horses. Related lodge families from numerous villages made up clans, whose members were expected to help and guide each other but who were forbidden to marry other clan members. Clans were competitive, especially in war, but it was the age-grade societies, transcending village and clan, that were looked to for personal prestige. Young men purchased membership in the lowest society at 12 or 13 years of age, progressing to higher and more expensive levels as they reached the proper age. Besides serving as warrior bands, each group was responsible for a social function: policing the village, scouting, or planning the hunt. Most important, the age-grade societies were a means of social control, setting standards of behavior and transmitting tribal lore and custom.

The roles of men and women were strictly defined. Men spent their time seeking spiritual knowledge, hunting, and horse raiding—all difficult and dangerous but relatively infrequent undertakings. Women performed virtually all the routine work: gardening, preparing food, maintaining the lodges, and, until the tribes obtained horses, carrying burdens. The lives of these people were not totally devoted to subsistence, however. They made time for play. Honored storytellers passed on oral traditions and moral lessons, focusing on traditional tribal values of respect, humility, and strength. The open area in the center of each village was often given over to dancing and to ritual, which bonded the members of the tribe and reaffirmed their place in the world.

The Village Economy

Agriculture was the economic foundation of the Knife River people, who harvested much of their food from rich flood-plain gardens. The land, which was controlled by women, passed through the female line, and the number of women who could work determined the size of each family's plot. They raised squash, pumpkin, beans, sunflowers, and, most important, tough, quick-maturing varieties of corn that thrived in the meager rainfall and short growing season of the Knife River area. Summer's first corn was celebrated in the Green Corn ceremony, a lively dance followed by a feast of corn. Berries, roots, and fish supplemented their diet, while upland hunting provided buffalo meat, hides, bones, and sinew.

These proficient farmers traded their surplus produce to nomadic tribes for buffalo hides, deer skins, dried meat, and other items in short supply. At the junction of major trade routes, they became brokers, dealing in goods within a vast trade network: obsidian from Wyoming, copper from the Great Lakes, shells from the Gulf of Mexico and the Pacific Northwest, and, after the 17th century, guns, horses, and metal objects. High quality flint quarried locally found its way to tribes spread over a large part of the continent through this trading system.

The Battle and the Hunt

In this tribal culture, raiding and hunting were the chief occupations of the men. When conflict was imminent, a war chief assumed leadership of the village. Although horses and loot often came from the raids, the conflicts were more important as stages on which warriors could prove themselves. Hunting parties were planned in much the same fashion, with a respected hunter choosing participants and planning the event. Prowess in battle and hunt led to status in the village, both individually and for the hero's society and clan. Ambitious young men would risk leading a party, which was highly rewarding if successful but ruinous to their reputation if not.

The primary weapon was the bow and arrow, used along with clubs, tomahawks, lances, shields, and knives. Even more prestigious than wounding or killing an enemy was "counting coup"—touching him in battle. But ambition did not spur every action: warriors often had to defend the village against raids by other tribes. When men prevailed in battle, the women would celebrate with dance and song.

Spirit and Ritual

Spirits guided the events of the material world, and from an early age, tribal members (usually male) sought their help. Fasting in a sacred place, a boy hoped to be visited by a spirit—often in animal form—who would give him power and guide him through life. The nature of the vision reported to his elders determined a man's role within the tribe. If directed by his vision, he would make a great sacrifice to the spirits, spilling his blood in the Okipa ceremony. The Okipa was the most important of a number of ceremonies performed by Mandan clans and age-grade societies to ensure good crops, successful hunts, and victory in battle. Ceremonies could be conducted only by those with "medicine," which was a bundle of sacred objects associated with tribal mythology purchased from a fellow clan or society member. With bundle ownership came responsibility for knowledge of the songs, stories, prayers, and rituals necessary for spiritual communication. Certain bundle owners were looked upon as respected leaders of the tribe.

Handout 2: Western Contact

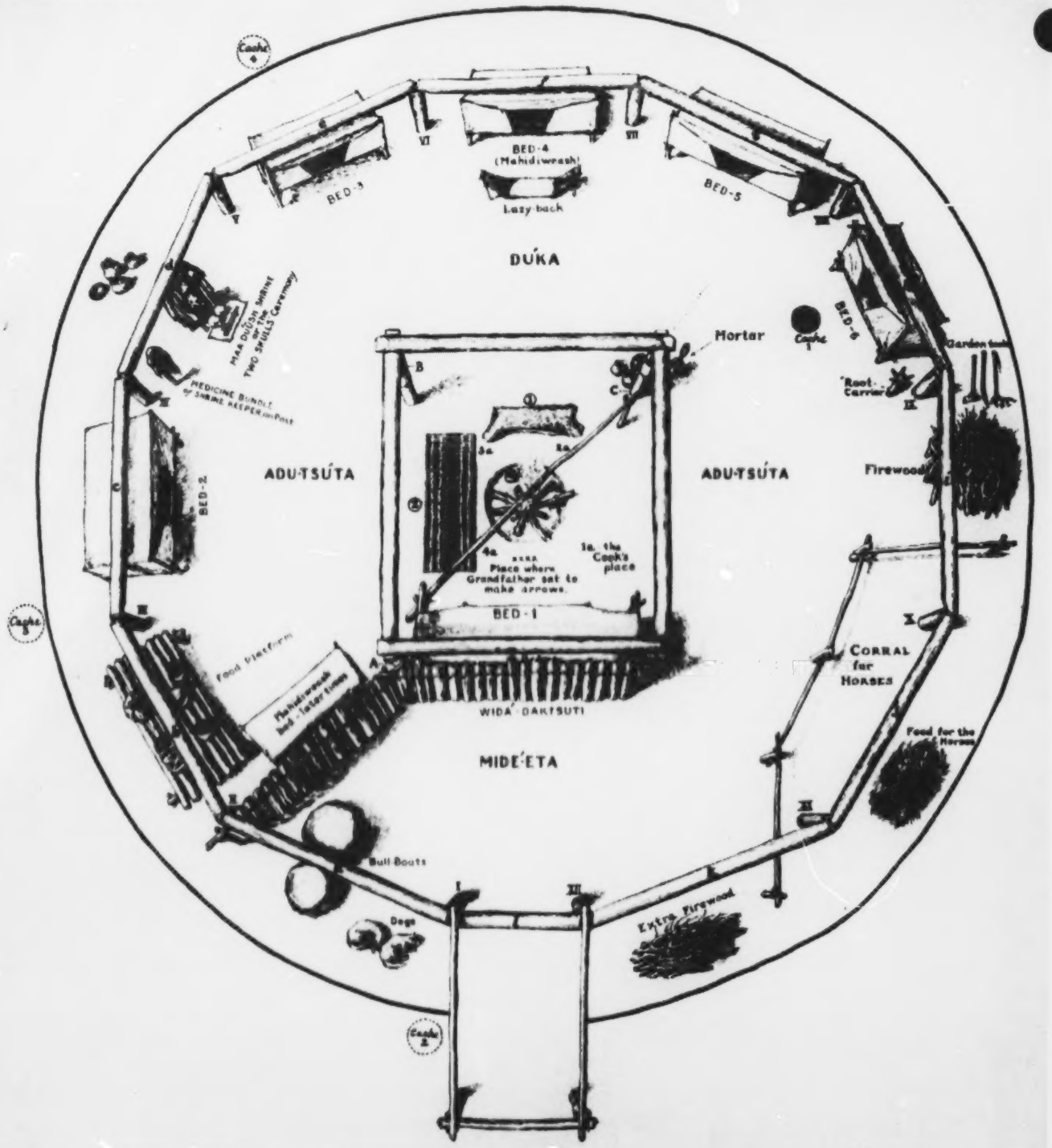
By the mid-18th century the villages of the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara served as centers of trade, which attracted Indians and European Americans alike and led to a degree of cultural sophistication and affluence that has been regarded by some anthropologists as a culture climax of native North Americans.

Because of their role as trade centers and their location on a tributary of the Missouri River, a major artery of western travel, the villages at Knife River received many European American visitors—men drawn by the prospect of wealth in the fur trade, exploration and national expansion, and simple curiosity. For the most part, the Mandan and Hidatsa received these outsiders with openness and hospitality, providing a welcome respite to weary travelers and an important staging area for further travel and fur-trade operations in more remote regions. This frequent and sustained contact with a different culture ultimately transformed the traditional way of life for the Hidatsa and Mandan, while contributing to the economic development and westward expansion of America.

When trader Pierre de la Verendrye—a French-Canadian colonial officer responsible for opening up much of the western Great Lakes region—walked into a Mandan village in 1738, he found a native American society at the height of its prosperity. Verendrye's arrival marked the first recorded European visit to the Indians of the Upper Missouri River Valley and began a relentless process that transformed a culture within 100 years. At first the three tribes remained relatively isolated, although there were increasing contacts with French, Spanish, English, and American fur traders. Their culture was still healthy when explorer David Thompson reached the area in 1797, but the pace of change quickened after the Lewis and Clark expedition visited the tribes. The expedition spent the winter of 1805 a few miles south of the Knife River villages, where the men built a three-sided fort, which they named Fort Mandan. The men of the expedition frequently visited with the villagers. During this same winter, fur trapper Toussaint Charbonneau and his Shoshone wife, Sakakawea, were hired to guide the explorers westward. Other explorers, including Prince Maximillian of Weid-Neuwied, whose ethnological and natural history notes are still a primary reference on the Mandan and Hidatsa, and artists such as Karl Bodmer and George Catlin, drew clear portraits of a society in transition. Naturalist John James Audubon visited in 1843, but by then the culture had changed radically.

An influx of European American fur traders set up new trade patterns that undermined the tribe's traditional position as brokers in a long-established American Indian trade network. Villagers grew more dependent on European goods such as horses, weapons, cloth, and iron pots. Diseases carried by the Europeans and overhunting of the bison further weakened the failing culture. There were several small pox epidemics between 1780 and 1856: the epidemic of 1837–38 was especially tragic with a mortality rate of almost 60 percent. In 1845 most of the remaining Hidatsa and Mandan joined together to establish Like-a-Fishhook Village some 40 miles northwest of the Knife River villages. In 1862 the remaining Arikara joined them, and the tribes became known as the Three Affiliated Tribes. In 1865 they were forced to leave their village and move onto the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation, where they continue to live today.

Student handouts were compiled from the National Park Service visitors' guide for Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site, 1989. Additional information in Student Handout 2 came from the National Register nomination form, "Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site Archeological District" (Mercer County, North Dakota), Thomas D. Thiessen, archeologist, Midwest Archeological Center, National Park Service, 1987.



Aerial view of a 12-post earthlodge's layout. Earthlodges were constructed in the following order: Four interior supporting posts (B) were hammered into the ground and joined by four beams. Exterior supporting posts (I, II, III, and so on) were also placed into the ground and connected by stringers (a, b, c, and so on), followed by the installation of leaners and rafters (not visible here) to provide support for the walls. Finally, willows, grass, and earth provided covering for the walls. (American Museum of Natural History)

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Aerial view of Big Hidatsa Village, Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site, Stanton vicinity, North Dakota. (North Dakota State Highway Department, 1967)

Hidatsa Village, Earth Covered Lodges, on the Knife River, George Catlin. (National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr.)

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Bird's-Eye View of the Mandan Village, George Catlin. (National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr.)

Winter Village of the Minatarres [Hidatsa], Karl Bodmer. (Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Nebraska)

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